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# USDA'S REPORT TO CONSUMERS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE • OFFICE OF COMMUNICATION • WASHINGTON, D.C. 20250

March-April 1975

NO. 127

## EAT WHAT YOU CAN

But Be Sure You Can It Right. In looking for ways to stretch their food dollar, many families are growing their own fruits and vegetables--and canning the result. Home canning provides tasty, inexpensive, quality products--and a sense of real satisfaction and achievement. If you are considering canning food this year--whether for the first time or after a few years' lapse--remember that it is important to follow reliable directions and to use the proper equipment. Nothing will be gained by canning if food spoils or your family becomes ill from food poisoning. Because of the increase in new gardeners and novice canners during the past year--and an even larger number declaring their intentions for the coming season--the U.S. Department of Agriculture has launched an information/education campaign to alert consumers to the dangers of improper home canning procedures. As a part of the campaign, conferences are being held during April, May and June in several large cities (you might want to check your local papers for announcements if you live in or near Los Angeles, Dallas, Atlanta, Philadelphia, Chicago, Denver, Minneapolis, Seattle or Detroit). Information kits, "Keep It Hot; Keep It Cold; Keep It Safe," containing USDA publications and other information on home canning, home freezing and related safety factors, are being distributed. (A limited supply of the kits are available free from Room 460-A, Special Reports Division, Office of Communication, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.) And home economists of the Cooperative Extension Service, located in almost every county, are ready and available to answer questions and supply expert advice to home canners. So, after the harvest and as you enjoy your good-tasting, nutritious, inexpensive and properly canned foods--bon appetit.

## FOOD STAMP INFORMATION

To Fit The Pocket. The Food and Nutrition Service, the agency which administers USDA's food assistance programs, has recently issued two booklets about the Food Stamp Program--both pocket size for quick and handy reference. "Food Stamp Handbook for Volunteers," (FNS-1) is a revised edition of a popular publication designed for persons who work with poor families. The handbook outlines some of the ways to help families improve their diets and offers facts about the Food Stamp Program. The second booklet, "Shopping With Food Stamps," (PA-1109) contains many of the important rules for taking part in the Food Stamp Program. It also lists tips on how to shop, store and use food to put more food on the table and provide better nutrition for the family. Single free copies of the booklets are available from the Information Division, Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.



## SPRING FOOD PREVIEW

The good news for consumers about retail food prices this year is that so far they are climbing at less than half the rate of last year. And they are expected to climb at about the same rate as the spring progresses.

Last year, food prices climbed 4.6 percent in the first three months of the year. This year the rate of increase was cut to less than 2 percent. It is expected that the increase for the spring months will be at about the same rate. Most of the increases ahead will be in red meat and poultry prices.

But farm commodity markets are unpredictable--and likely to stay that way. If markets strengthened--with continued cost pressures in the business of marketing and distributing food--grocery store prices could rise more rapidly than they did in winter.

What about individual food items you'll shop for this spring? During this last winter, beef prices dropped, reflecting exceptionally heavy slaughter of cattle. Producers have been pushed to slaughter their cattle by high costs for feed plus a record large cattle herd.

Traditionally, however, spring has been the time for grazing cattle on lush new pasture and on range, a time for sending fewer animals to slaughter. Lower feed prices during late winter also may have encouraged some cattle producers to hold on to their herds. So look for beef prices to go up this spring.

If you're shopping for breakfast bacon, dinner ham, and other pork items, expect to pay higher prices. Increases could be less if beef output stays large. But with last fall's reduced corn crop and resulting high feed prices, many hog producers sold their breeding stock. Per capita pork supplies are now at about a 10-year low. It's unlikely pork will build up to more plentiful levels until around 1977.

Lamb, another traditional spring dish, is going to be higher than last fall and winter. Lamb and sheep numbers are at their lowest level ever.

Poultry producers, adjusting to tighter supplies and high prices for feed, continue to limit output. This may hit home during spring in the form of rising retail broiler and turkey prices. Whether poultry producers step up production much in the second half of 1975 will depend on the size of crops farmers are able to harvest.

The best poultry buy for spring: eggs. Like broiler and turkey production, egg output has been pinched in recent months. While that would suggest you'd pay more for eggs now than last winter, spring is always a flush season for eggs. Even so, look for prices somewhat above the 68¢ they averaged last spring but below levels of last fall and winter.

We started 1975 with larger stocks of frozen fish than a year earlier because of competition from the large meat and poultry supplies last year. Still, retail fish prices rose: costs of marketing and distributing fish were going up last year too.



The prices you pay for cereals and bakery products may edge up during spring, though less than the rise expected in food prices generally. While the cost of baking and distributing continues upward, the cost of farm ingredients--flour, cooking oil, sugar--has eased considerably lately. This has been holding down retail increases.

Rice prices shot up over the past year and a half. But the picture's changing. In January, for example, rice at the grocery store averaged 2¢ a pound less than a year earlier. Farm prices for rice have been substantially below last year's level, so possibly you'll see further reductions in retail prices this spring.

Good fruit buys this season. Look for plenty of fresh oranges, lemons, and strawberries and apples and pears from storage. Fruit prices will go through their seasonal increases this spring but these may average only moderately above those of a year ago. Canned juices are an economical choice, especially orange juice.

In the frozen fruit section, expect to spend a bit more than you have in recent months for frozen orange juice. Its price may hold steady for the season due to large supplies. You'll find plenty of frozen strawberries and raspberries too.

Canned fruits? Farm ingredients cost more than last year and processing and marketing costs are higher, too. So expect higher prices but plentiful supplies of pears, peaches, apples and applesauce, fruit cocktail, tart and sweet cherries, and plums. There won't be as many canned apricots and pineapples though, due to last season's smaller crops.

Raisins and prunes will both be abundant this spring. Prices are likely to stay below last spring's levels.

Nut lovers, there are more almonds this season. Peanut enthusiasts will pay a bit more for peanut butter. Because marketing costs for candy generally are high, peanuts may be sprinkled more lightly through candy this season.

Wholesale sugar prices have been falling since late November. It took a while for retail prices to drop but they're coming down now. A 5-pound bag of sugar cost 13 cents less in January than December.

Coffee addicts, expect to pay about the same price for your favorite beverage this season. Worldwide coffee production rose sharply last year. But coffee growers intend to retain some of their production. This may help stabilize coffee prices. The tea drinker's outlook is not so good--prices will likely go up.

Milk production through June 1975 should about equal last year's. Prices for dairy products will be rising less than those for other foods this spring. The neck-and-neck race of butter and margarine continues but look for more specials on margarine, thanks to declining prices for vegetable oils. Processed cheese prices likely won't go over those of last spring.

Down over 12 cents a pound this January from their peak last May, potatoes are a most economical vegetable choice this spring. Last year's storage crop exceeded the previous harvest by 13 percent, so there'll be plenty of potatoes. Try dry beans, too. All types will be abundant, the white slightly more so than the colored varieties. Look for fewer spring onions, though. Texas acreage in onions, substantially smaller this year, will curtail supplies and help push prices up. Prices will still be far below the record level of 2 years back. You'll find seasonally larger amounts of tomatoes and sweet corn in the grocery stores.

## CONSUMERS RATE THE FOOD INDUSTRY

Some Good News; Some Bad News. American consumers say they are generally satisfied with the food they buy and the stores they buy it from. But, there are complaints. According to a nationwide survey conducted by USDA's Economic Research Service in the spring of 1974, prices bothered shoppers the most; individual food items and reliability of food manufacturers' ads drew heavy criticism. Two-thirds of the survey respondents said they were satisfied all or almost all the time with food they purchased; 70 percent reported themselves pleased all or nearly all the time with foodstores they frequent. Over half of the participants claimed they were satisfied always or nearly so with the seven major food product groups. Of these, dairy products and eggs pleased them most; convenience foods the least. Within the food product groups, certain items drew fire at the time of the survey: prices brought complaints--especially for beef, pork, fresh tomatoes, potatoes and milk. Tomatoes got the highest dissatisfaction rating of the 31 products surveyed; price, ripeness, taste and appearance all drew negative comments. Of the convenience foods tested, skillet main dishes and frozen convenience dinners got the worst scores. In contrast, processed fruit and vegetable products rated favorably. When asked if they had at times been dissatisfied with a foodstore or item during the previous year, 70 percent said yes. But only 7 percent complained directly to the manufacturers and only 3 percent informed public officials or consumer protection agencies. Consumers did protest to foodstore managers and did participate in boycotts of food and foodstores, but most only voiced their complaints to friends and relatives. Single free copies of the study, "Consumer Satisfaction with Food Products and Marketing Services," (AER-281) are available from the Publications Division, Economic Research Service, Room 0054-S, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

## MARKETING ORDERS

What And Why They Are. Federal milk marketing orders and Federal marketing orders for fruits and vegetables are highly important--and little understood--systems that help provide consumers with their regularly delivered supply of high quality produce and milk. These two marketing systems have been explained in clear and concise terms in two fact sheets prepared by USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service. Single free copies of "Facts About: Federal Marketing Orders for Fruits and Vegetables--in Brief" (AMS-563) and "Facts About: Federal Marketing Orders for Milk--In Brief" (AMS-564) are available from the Information Division, Agricultural Marketing Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250. For more detailed and technical information on the two systems, AMS Information Division has available single free copies of "Questions and Answers on Federal Marketing Orders" (AMS 559). "Marketing Agreements and Orders for Fruits and Vegetables" (PA-1095) can be ordered from Publications Division, Office of Communication, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

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